

GRANDMA'S BEST YEARS

By **Eddie McPherson**

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Synopsis

When Grandma Simms comes from the farm to visit her daughter, she finds a situation which is not to her liking. It seems that her daughter, Mrs. Abbott, has become a social climber since the death of her husband. Because of this, the three Abbott children and Sadie, the maid, are having a miserable time. The very day Grandma arrives, Mrs. Abbott is bringing three upper-crust guests home for the weekend. One of them is rich and snobbish Arthur Carlson, who, Mrs. Abbott insists her daughter must marry although she loves Brandon, a veterinarian assistant. Another of her guests is Miss Quelch, an unlikable spinster, who runs an exclusive girls' school, to which Mrs. Abbott intends to send Kimberly, her fifteen-year-old daughter. Willie, the thirteen-year-old son, is also suffering because his mother won't allow him to do anything he wants. She insists that he practice on his violin so that she can impress people with her culture.

Well, Grandma is determined to put a stop to all this, so she comes up with the brilliant scheme of inviting the family black sheep, Cousin Oscar, to Mrs. Abbott's weekend party. She thinks this ought to sufficiently disgrace her social-climbing daughter and set things straight.

This scheme doesn't come off quite as planned. Since she has never seen Cousin Oscar, Grandma mistakes a criminal for her long-lost relative and he, needing a hideout, accepts her invitation and even brings his wife and daughter along.

Naturally, the weekend party is hardly what Mrs. Abbott had hoped for, but neither is it exactly what Grandma wanted, for the criminal "relatives" find it necessary to get rough, causing plenty of exciting complications. But when Grandma gets hold of her trusty shotgun, she emerges the heroine of the situation; the police nab the long-sought after crooks; Mrs. Abbott begins to see the light, allowing her children to follow their true inclinations; and Brandon and Grandma get handsome rewards. Plenty of twists and turns keep the audience wondering and laughing.

By Eddie McPherson

CHARACTERS:
(6 Men, 10 Women)

- Mrs. Abbott.....Mother of about 45, tries to act very sophisticated. (136 lines)
- Sadie.....The maid, about 30. Naïve, plain and outspoken. (43 lines)
- Ramey Abbott.....Oldest daughter, about 22. Pretty and not too forward. (147 lines)
- Kimberly Abbott.....Younger daughter, 15. Full of pep. (88 lines)
- Kasey Morgan.....Kimberly's best friend, also 15. (29 lines)
- Willie Abbott.....The son, age 13. All-American boy; somewhat naïve. (105 lines)
- Shorty.....Willie's sidekick and fellow ballplayer. (40 lines)
- Brandon Meyerson.....Ramey's boyfriend. Good looking, likeable, 22. (73 lines)
- Grandma.....About 65, wiry, full of life and ideas. Country. (187 lines)
- Patch.....Conventional crook, wears a patch over one eye, 35. (104 lines)
- Mabel.....His wife, younger, and just as tough. (63 lines)
- Bubbles.....Their gum-chewing daughter, 14. Hardly respectful. (14 lines)

Grandma's Best Years

Mrs. Carlson.....Society matron. Her dignity is easily
offended. (29 lines)

Miss QuelchSkinny spinster, also dignified and haughty.
(52 lines)

Arthur CarlsonMrs. Carlson's son, about 25. Thinks highly
of himself. (46 lines)

Cousin Oscar.....Meek little man, middle aged, and soft
spoken. (8 lines)

Perusal Only
Do Not Copy

PROPS

Flowers – Mrs. Abbott
Slip of paper – Sadie
Catcher’s mitt – Willie
Suitcases – Grandma
Painting (Wrapped when brought out on stage, then unwrapped) – Sadie
Ball – (Comes through the window and goes into closet)
Letter – Grandma
Cookbook – Sadie
Napkin – Patch
Pebble – Brandon
Painting (The real “Fransco”) – Joyce and Patch
Piece of paper – Grandma
2 guns – Patch
Shotgun with blanks – Grandma
Suitcases - Arthur

Note: The two paintings look almost identical, being nothing but a mass of color splotches, giving an ultramodern “abstract” appearance. Both are in simple frames, about four feet wide by three feet long. The first painting to be brought in is seen again in the second scene, second act, with the hole the size of a baseball punch through one corner.

SOUND EFFECTS

Doorbell
Violin playing Schubert’s “The Bee” (A piece well-known to all students of the violin)
Recitation by Kimberly – lines from Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade”.
Police siren

ACT ONE – Scene 1.

TIME: Early afternoon of a late summer day.

PLACE: The living room of the Abbott home.

AT RISE: Mrs. Abbott enters through arch Left carrying flowers. She crosses to center and calls.

MRS. ABBOTT: William? William Abbott, where have you run off to?

SADIE: *(Entering, drying a dish with a small towel)* Is somethin' the matter, Mrs. Abbott?

MRS. ABBOTT: Sadie, have you seen any of my children?

SADIE: I'm only the maid, Mrs. Abbott. You pay me to cook and clean and sometimes, if I'm up to it, walk to the road and fetch the mail. But nowhere in my job description does it say anything about takin' care of your...

MRS. ABBOTT: *(Cutting her off)* All right, Sadie, a simple 'yes' or 'no' would suffice. *(Gets a loser look at her maid)* Have you been crying again?

SADIE: I can't help it, Mrs. Abbott. Every time I watch that scene, it gets me right here. *(In the heart.)*

MRS. ABBOTT: Well, I wish you would watch *Gone With the Wind* on your own time. There's so much to be done before our company arrives.

SADIE: *(Ignoring MRS. ABBOTT'S last sentence, she holds the dish towel up in the air and the plate against her chest.)* As God as my witness! As God as my witness! I will never be hungry again! *(Drops her head after her dramatic moment)*

WILLIE'S VOICE: I told you you've got to throw it harder!

MRS. ABBOTT: *(Rushing to the window and looking out)* William Abbott! Why didn't you answer me when I called you? Where are your sisters? *(Draws in her head and speaks to SADIE)* Talking to that boy is like talking to a rock. And where in the world is Kimberly? She's probably off with that Kasey girl again. I swear my kids are incorrigible. If only their father were alive to see the way they're turning out. Here it is, almost time for my big weekend party and none of them is doing what I have asked.

SADIE: *(Arranging a few pillows on the sofa)* Ah, don't be too hard on the kids, Mrs. Abbott. Kimberly's a sweetheart and that Willie is gettin' better at baseball everyday.

MRS. ABBOTT: *William, Sadie. William.* Not Willie. Do you have all the food for dinner?

SADIE: Yes ma'am, but I didn't recognize one thing on that list you gave me.

MRS. ABBOTT: Like what?

SADIE: (*Brings the list out of her pocket*) First of all, I've never heard of these es-car-gots.

MRS. ABBOTT: That's pronounced es-car-go. They are snails. What else?

SADIE: What about this cave ee ear.

MRS. ABBOTT: Caviar. Those are fish eggs.

SADIE: Fish legs?

MRS. ABBOTT: Fish eggs, Sadie. Eggs.

SADIE: Slimy slugs and nasty fish eggs for supper. (*Sarcastically*) Ain't we sophisticated!

MRS. ABBOTT: Sadie, it's like I explained it before. The Carlsons and Miss Quelch are high society. It's quite important that we impress them with this dinner.

SADIE: Slugs and fish eggs; I don't know what this world is comin' to.

MRS. ABBOTT: Now, where is Ramey? She's supposed to stay here at the house while I run into town to pick up that fresh bouquet of flowers.

SADIE: I think she took a drive with Brandon.

MRS. ABBOTT: Again? That girl is spending far too much time with that veterinarian's assistant or what ever he is. (*Changing subjects*) Willy – I mean *William*- has got to get in here to practice his violin.

SADIE: Mrs. Abbott, every time Willy scratches on that thing, every dog on the block goes to howlin'.

MRS. ABBOTT: William's teacher says he's getting along beautifully. He's going to be playing "The Bee" for our guests tonight. Won't they be impressed?

SADIE: (*As she exits*) Only if they're tone deaf. (*The towel in the air*) As God as my witness! (*She exits through arch Right.*)

MRS. ABBOTT: (*Crosses to the window and shouts through it*) William Abbott, get in here this very minute!

WILLIE: (*Walks up to the window from outside*) But Mom, Shorty came over so we can practice pitching.

MRS. ABBOTT: You've got more important things to practice right now. Get in here NOW!

WILLIE: (*Shouts back to his friend*) Hold up a minute, Shorty! (*Turns back to MRS. ABBOTT*) Mom, we've got a game Saturday.

MRS. ABBOTT: (*She turns from the window, crosses to the sofa and begins to rearrange the pillows the way they were before SADIE touched them. As she does this, WILLIE disappears from the window.*) William, I have told you time and time again, you cannot play a baseball game next Saturday. You must practice your violin lesson. (*Turns to window*) So, get in here...(*Notices he's gone so crosses to the window*) Young man, ignoring me is not going to do you any good. William Abbott!

- WILLIE:** *(Has entered through the arch Left and stands innocently)* Yes ma'am.
- MRS. ABBOTT:** *(Turns quickly)* Son, please don't do that to your poor mother. I'm nervous enough.
- WILLIE:** Sorry, Mom.
- MRS. ABBOTT:** *(Combing through his hair with her fingers)* Honey, you've already forgotten what to call me.
- WILLIE:** Kids don't call their mom's *Mother* any more.
- MRS. ABBOTT:** Unless you want to play baseball with two broken arms, you'd better play along.
- WILLIE:** *(Quickly)* Yes, Mother.
- MRS. ABBOTT:** Now get in there to your violin and practice the way I asked you to.
- WILLIE:** Yes, Mother.
- MRS. ABBOTT:** *(Straightening his shirt collar)* I guess you do come by your apathy honestly. Your father was the very same. Never cared to improve his position in life. But now that it's up to me, I intend to better our lives. Especially for you children. If I don't who will?
- WILLIE:** Nobody?
- MRS. ABBOTT:** *(Referring to his improved appearance)* There, you look like a picture right out of a magazine. Speaking of picture, that new painting I bought is supposed to be delivered today. Where *is* Ramey?
- WILLIE:** She went for a drive with Brandon. *(In a love-sick tone)* They're in luuuuuuv.
- MRS. ABBOTT:** Don't make fun of your sister. Besides, I won't allow her to court a veterinarian's assistant. What future could there be in that?
- SHORTY:** *(Entering through arch Left)* Willie, what's taking so long? We've got lots of practicing to do.
- MRS. ABBOTT:** I'm sorry, Kenneth, but William has other practicing to do right now.
- WILLIE:** Mom, you don't have to tell the whole world.
- SHORTY:** We sure do need to get in shape. Those guys from Gaylesville are pretty tough to beat. That's what Brandon says, anyway.
- MRS. ABBOTT:** What does Brandon have to do with you two playing ball?
- WILLIE:** Brandon's coaching our team. He's also teaching me how to train dogs. *(Pulls a whistle from his pocket)* See, here's one of those dog-training whistles.
- MRS. ABBOTT:** *(Straightening a picture on the wall)* I don't want you hanging around that Veterinarian office. There's no telling what kind of disease you'll catch.
- SHORTY:** *(To WILLIE as SHORTY takes the whistle from him)* This is a whistle? *(Blows into the whistle but no sound comes out)* I think it's busted.

WILLIE: It ain't busted.

MRS. ABBOTT: William, what did I tell you about saying that word?

WILLIE: Sorry, Mom. (*Back to SHORTY*) It ain't broke. We can't hear it with our human ears – only dogs can hear it. Watch. (*Crosses to the window and blows into the whistle. Several dogs bark in the distance.*) See?

SHORTY: Cool.

MRS. ABBOTT: Take that whistle out of your mouth. You don't know where it's been. And get in there and practice that violin.

WILLIE: Yes, "Mother". Shorty, you can use my glove. It's out under the tree.

SHORTY: Okay, I'll see you later. (*He puts the bib of his cap down over his eyes and exits.*)

MRS. ABBOTT: (*To WILLIE as she points toward arch Right.*) Go!

WILLIE: I forgot my backpack in the front yard. I promise I'll be right back. (*He exits quickly*)

MRS. ABBOTT: (*Calling*) Sadie, could you come here, please?

SADIE'S VOICE: I can't right now; I'm up to my knockers in fish eggs.

MRS. ABBOTT: I just need you to remember to be careful with that oil painting when it arrives.

SADIE'S VOICE: What did you say?

MRS. ABBOTT: Never mind, I'll come to you. (*She exits through arch Right. KIMBERLY and KASEY enter through arch Left.*)

KIMBERLY: (*Carrying a small music-store bag*) Come on in, Kasey, I want you to listen to my new CD. Oh, I almost forgot. Mother won't let me play my music in the house.

KASEY: Not at all?

KIMBERLY: Not unless it's opera or Mozart. (*Sits on the sofa*) She's trying to impress those high-class Carlson's this weekend.

KASEY: I heard they were millionaires.

KIMBERLY: Who cares. I don't know what has gotten into Mother, anyway. She puts on airs more and more every day.

KASEY: Have you tried talking to her about it?

KIMBERLY: She doesn't care what we think. The worst part is that she's having this awful Miss. Quelch here.

KASEY: (*Reading the back of a CD case she pulls from the bag*) Who's Miss. Quelch?

KIMBERLY: She runs that exclusive Quelch School for Girls. Mother wants me to attend there. So she has invited the owner along this weekend in order to "impress" her.

KASEY: A school full of nothing but *girls*?

KIMBERLY: Exactly. On top of that, she's looking to get Ramey married to Arthur Carlson.

KASEY: I thought Ramey was dating Brandon.

KIMBERLY: Mother thinks Brandon won't amount to anything.

KASEY: What's this Arthur Carlson like?

KIMBERLY: Snide, pretentious, arrogant, and those are his good qualities. So, you can see how our world is turning upside down. Ramey's being forced to marry a mongrel and I'm being shipped off to a female monastery.

KASEY: Look at the bright side.

KIMBERLY: I'd be glad to, what is it?

KASEY: *(Thinks a moment)* You're right, it's the end of the world.

MRS. ABBOTT enters through arch Right.

MRS. ABBOTT: Kimberly Abbott, have you memorized that poem you're going to recite this weekend?

KIMBERLY: Mother, you can't be serious about me reciting "The Charge of the Light Brigade" to total strangers.

MRS. ABBOTT: *(Hands on hips)* I couldn't be more serious. It's a classic. And speaking of rehearsing, I haven't heard your brother play one note on that violin. *(Shouting)* William!

KIMBERLY: I think I saw him in the front yard playing ball.

MRS. ABBOTT: He is, is he? I'll put a stop to that right now. *(She exits quickly through arch Left.)*

KIMBERLY: See what I mean? If I had anywhere to go, I would just run away from home.

KASEY: You could always stay with me.

KIMBERLY: Thanks, but I don't think I could put up with your brother that long.

KASEY: Oh, speaking of my brother, I've got to get home and let him out of the closet. I locked him in there more than two hours ago.

KIMBERLY: Okay, I'll call you later.

KASEY: By the way, when is your snooty company arriving? I sure would like to get a close up look at a *real* millionaire.

KIMBERLY: I guess they'll be here tonight.

KASEY: I'll be around.

KIMBERLY: Okay.

KASEY: Good luck. *(She exits through arch Left at the same time MRS. ABBOTT enters arch Left followed by WILLIE.)*

MRS. ABBOTT: *(Furiously crosses to center)* William Abbott, I thought I told you to get in there and practice that violin.

WILLIE: But Mom, it's just that...

MRS. ABBOTT: Mother! My name is *Mother!* And stop slouching!

WILLIE: *(He's scared out of his wits. He's never seen this side of his mom. He stands up straight as though he were a soldier.)* Yes, Mom! Mother! Your Highness! Ma'am! I'm really sorry and will never let you down again! *(Salutes)*

MRS. ABBOTT: *(Pulls WILLIE and KIMBERLY close to her)* You two listen to me. Our high-class guests will be walking through that door tonight expecting to meet an elegant family who knows a thing or two about how to behave in a dignified manner. So, if you're thinking of bucking the system, I just want you to remember that I'm doing this for you.

KIMBERLY: For us? But, Mother, that's the point. We –

MRS. ABBOTT: *(Quickly shoots a look to her daughter on the verge of looking possessed)* Were you going to say something, my daughter?

KIMBERLY: *(Taken aback)* Um...I was just going to say that...we would be more than happy to play along. Isn't that right, little brother?

WILLIE: *(Still standing at attention, he salutes.)* I love playing the violin, sir! I mean, ma'am!

MRS. ABBOTT: *(Composing herself)* At least we understand one another. You're dismissed. *(She exits through arch Right.)*

WILLIE: *(Relaxes)* Woah, I've never seen Mom so uptight.

KIMBERLY: I'm telling you she's flipped.

RAMEY and BRANDON enter through arch Left.

RAMEY: *(Sheepishly)* Is Mother still here, Kim?

KIMBERLY: Yes, she's getting ready to go into town.

RAMEY: *(To BRANDON)* You might need to go home, then.

KIMBERLY: No, let him stay. Mother's calmer when company's around.

BRANDON: I'm not sure I count as company any more; I'm more of an intruder.

WILLIE: *(Crossing to BRANDON)* Hey, Brandon, I've been driving the dogs crazy with this whistle you gave me. *(He runs to the window and starts to blow the whistle. BRANDON crosses quickly to WILLIE and stops him.)*

BRANDON: Willie, no! Don't blow that whistle.

WILLIE: Why not? *(He blows into the whistle. BRANDON covers his ears as though he's in great pain. Dogs bark in the background.)*

BRANDON: Please don't do that!

RAMEY: Brandon, you're acting as though you can hear the dog whistle.

BRANDON: I can hear it, and it kills my ears!

WILLIE: But how can a human hear a dog whistle?

BRANDON: I don't know, I guess I'm one of the "lucky" few. So, if you don't mind, please leave the whistle in your pocket.

WILLIE: Okay. Want to come out and let me show you a few pitches?

RAMEY: Some other time, Willie.

BRANDON: Sorry, Willie – I've got to run right now.

WILLIE: It won't take but a minute.

KIMBERLY: *(Taking WILLIE'S arm and pulling him toward arch Right.)*

Come on, dummy, can't you see they want to be alone? You'd better get in there and start practicing that violin.

WILLIE: If I've got to practice the violin – you've got to practice your poem.

KIMBERLY: Okay, okay. *(They exit through arch Right.)*

BRANDON: *(Turning to RAMEY)* I'd better get out of here before your mom comes in.

RAMEY: Wait, Brandon. Before you go, there's something I need to tell you.

BRANDON: What is it?

RAMEY: Nothing much, it's just that...well, it seems that...you see...

BRANDON: Come on, Ramey, just spit it out.

RAMEY: *(Quickly)* I'm going to be proposed to this weekend.

BRANDON: *(Not catching on right away)* Now see, that wasn't so hard. *(Double take)* What did you just say?

RAMEY: Now, Brandon, just hear me out. One of Mother's guests, Arthur Carlson, is supposed to be proposing this weekend.

BRANDON: *(At a loss for words)* But...did you just say *propose*?

RAMEY: Yes. It's something Mother has arranged. She wants me to marry someone who can take care of me financially. But, don't worry – I will say 'no'. For all I know, Mother has arranged the whole thing without even consulting me.

BRANDON: *(Quickly)* Then forget them all! Let's you and me get married right away.

RAMEY: It's not that easy, Brandon. I've got to be here to help Willie and Kimberly. Mother's going to have them completely maladjusted if she keeps on the way she is.

BRANDON: Just remember that if this Arthur guy asks you to marry him, I asked you first which means I have first dibs.

RAMEY: That's not the most romantic thing you've ever said to me.

MRS. ABBOTT'S VOICE: *(Sharply)* Ramey, is that you I hear?

RAMEY: *(To BRANDON)* It's Mother.

BRANDON: Guess I'd better go.

RAMEY: Don't worry, Brandon. It will all work out.

BRANDON: I'll call you.

RAMEY: All right. Bye. *(He hurries out arch Left. MRS. ABBOTT enters through arch Right, wearing a sweater or light jacket and carrying a purse on her shoulder.)*

MRS. ABBOTT: So you finally decided to come home. I need you to look after your siblings while I go into town. I'll be gone most of the afternoon.

RAMEY: *(Looking away)* Yes, I...

MRS. ABBOTT: You were out with *him* again, weren't you?

RAMEY: Him? I don't know what you're talking about.

MRS. ABBOTT: That Branson boy.

RAMEY: Brandon! (*Throws her hand over her mouth*)

MRS. ABBOTT: I knew it all along.

RAMEY: Mother, you need to know that if Arthur Carlson proposes to me, I will refuse him.

MRS. ABBOTT: You *won't* refuse him. I have thought this whole thing through and this is the best thing for you. Now, listen; they'll be delivering that painting today and it could be arriving at any time.

RAMEY: Painting?

MRS. ABBOTT: Yes, I realized we didn't have any true art in the house, so I called the art and antique shop this morning and they're sending out a picture.

RAMEY: You mean you haven't even seen what you bought?

MRS. ABBOTT: No, but I trust Mr. Townsend's taste. He assured me he would send out the best in my price range. Now, remember to make sure Kimberly and William practice while I'm gone... (*SADIE enters with a cookbook.*)

SADIE: Mrs. Abbott, I can't make heads or tails out of these fancy recipes you want me to cook.

MRS. ABBOTT: Sadie, all you have to do is follow the instructions. That shouldn't be too difficult - even for you.

SADIE: I can't read the writin' when it's written in French, Eye-talian and Chinese. Heck, they're all Greek to me.

MRS. ABBOTT: You told me you knew how to cook French food.

SADIE: French *fries*! I know how to cook French *fries*!

MRS. ABBOTT: Just look at the pictures and do the best you can.

Between you and the children, I don't know what kind of mess I'm getting myself into. That reminds me... (*Shouting*) I don't hear anything being rehearsed! Kimberly?! William?!

WILLIE'S VOICE: Yes, ma'am.

KIMBERLY'S VOICE: (*At the same time*) Yes, ma'am.

MRS. ABBOTT: (*Looking at her watch*) Good heavens, it's almost one-thirty. I've got to go or the guests will be here before I get back. Now, remember Ramey, I'm leaving everything in your hands.

RAMEY: (*Sad*) Yes, Mother.

MRS. ABBOTT: Sadie, please get back into the kitchen and figure out that cookbook.

SADIE: Mrs. Abbott, I hate to mention it, but I was thinkin' that maybe you'd like for me to perform my Scarlet O'Hara impression for your guests. I know they'd be impressed.

MRS. ABBOTT: I need you in the kitchen, Sadie. Maybe next time. *(From offstage comes the screechy sound of WILLIE practicing "The Bee". It is pretty erratic, only equaled by KIMBERLY'S recitation which is heard simultaneously.)* William, you're off key!

WILLIE: *(Stops playing)* Yes ma'am! *(Begins playing again)*

SADIE: That boy's fiddle sounds like two alley cats matin' on a bed of nails.
(Exits through arch Right.)

MRS. ABBOTT: *(Shouting after SADIE)* It's not a fiddle, it's a violin!

RAMEY: You'd better get going, Mother. I'll take care of things here.

MRS. ABBOTT: Very well. Ta ta. *(MRS. ABBOTT goes out arch Left. RAMEY looks troubled. The violin playing and the distant recitation go on for a moment, then RAMEY calls impatiently)* Willie! Kimberly! Mother's gone, you can stop now!

WILLIE'S VOICE: *(Violin stops)* But I'm supposed to practice.

RAMEY: You could practice from now to doom's day and you won't learn to play that thing.

WILLIE'S VOICE: Fine with me.

RAMEY: Kimberly, I said you could stop! *(KIMBERLY goes quiet. WILLIE enters through arch Right.)*

WILLIE: Thank goodness. That thing was killing my ears. *(KIMBERLY enters through arch Right.)*

KIMBERLY: Hey, Ramey, would it be okay if I go over to Kasey's house?

RAMEY: Okay, but don't stay too long.

WILLIE: Can I go outside and practice baseball with Shorty?

RAMEY: Be sure you get back inside before Mother gets back.

WILLIE: See you guys later. *(Runs and exits through arch left)*

KIMBERLY: Thanks, Ramey. *(Exits through arch left. SADIE enters through arch Right.)*

SADIE: *(Reading her cookbook. She has a towel thrown over her shoulder and flour smudged on her face.)* Now let's see here. Prends le poison dee loven. Miss Ramey, I'm glad you're here.

RAMEY: What's the matter, Sadie?

SADIE: I didn't want to say anything but I think your Mother is tryin' to murder us. She wants me to cook this. *(Pointing as she reads)* Prends le poison, dee loven. See? Poison!

RAMEY: *(Taking the book)* Sadie, it says, "prends le poisson de l'over." That translates, "Take the fish from the oven."

SADIE: Fish? Good heavens. I just thawed out twenty pounds of hamburger. Why don't these people just say what they mean?

RAMEY: Poor Sadie, Mother has you just as nervous as the rest of us. Do the best you can, Sadie. That's all you can do.

SADIE: If your mother doesn't like what she sees on the table tonight, she'll fire me and not think twice about it.

The voice of an elderly woman is heard off Left.

GRANDMA'S VOICE: Hello? Is anybody home?

RAMEY: Who is that?

SADIE: Didn't recognize the voice.

RAMEY: It sounded a little like...but it couldn't be. *(Crosses to Left center.)*

GRANDMA'S VOICE: Where is everybody?

RAMEY: *(Lighting up)* It's Grandma!

SADIE: You think she knows how to make good poison?

RAMEY: Where on earth did she come from? Grandma, we're in here!

(GRANDMA enters through arch Left with two bags.)

GRANDMA: Grab this bag for me, Ramey hun. My arm is getting weak.

(RAMEY takes one of the suitcases.)

RAMEY: Grandma, this sure is a surprise.

GRANDMA: *(Crossing to center and putting her bag down)* Ohh, look at you, Ramey Abbott – you have done gone and filled out in all the right places.

RAMEY: Thank you, Grandma. I think. And you sure are looking good.

GRANDMA: Don't lie, child. I'm sagging in all the *wrong* places.

RAMEY: Grandma, you should have called and we could have picked you up from the bus station.

GRANDMA: Now you know I never want any fuss made over me. I just got my canning finished up earlier than expected and said to myself – I'm going to visit my daughter and her sweet family – so, I packed up my stuff, hopped a Greyhound and here I am.

RAMEY: *(Hugging her)* It's so good to see you.

GRANDMA: I'm not intruding on anything am I?

RAMEY: Don't be silly, Grandma. You know you're always welcome here. Sadie, take Grandma's bags upstairs, would you?

GRANDMA: Sadie, don't you take a step. I can take care of my own bags. I may creak when I walk, but I still got some strength left.

SADIE: In that case, I'd better go find some poison to cook for tonight.

(Exits through arch Right.)

RAMEY: That's an awfully long ride on the bus, Grandma. Why don't you go upstairs and freshen up?

GRANDMA: No need for that – I washed my hands at the bus station.

RAMEY: *(Laughing)* Yep, you're the same old Grandma. How's everything on the farm?

GRANDMA: Coming along just fine. We put in thirty acres of corn this Spring. Our best milking cow has run off with one of our black bulls.

RAMEY: Grandma, you're making that up.

- GRANDMA:** It happened just as sure as I'm sitting here. How's everything been around here?
- RAMEY:** *(Reluctantly)* Well...
- GRANDMA:** I guess it ain't been the same since your daddy's gone.
- RAMEY:** You can say that again.
- GRANDMA:** And I bet that brother and sister of yours are growing like spring wheat. Where's your mama? Is she home?
- RAMEY:** She just left and is driving into town to pick up a floral arrangement for her weekend party.
- GRANDMA:** Party? Land sakes, I wish I'd known and I would have brought my clogging shoes. I love a good hoe down.
- RAMEY:** I'm afraid you won't find any dancing at this party, Grandma. It's more of a high-class affair.
- GRANDMA:** High class? Then I'm not interested. High class is another name for boring.
- RAMEY:** Anyway, her guests are coming in sometime later this afternoon. As a matter of fact you couldn't have come at a better time.
- GRANDMA:** Why's that, honey?
- RAMEY:** Well...*(Admitting)* Grandma, I've got to talk to someone about this or I'll burst.
- GRANDMA:** Well, then you'd better tell me.
- RAMEY:** It's Mother. She's...I don't know...she's changed.
- GRANDMA:** *(Curious)* Changed? You don't mean she's starting to admit her age, do you?
- RAMEY:** No ma'am, it's not that...
- GRANDMA:** You know, even if she is my daughter, I have to admit that woman has always been vain. She even tried to tell me she was only forty years old the last time I saw her. I said to her, I says, "Honey, you forget I was there when you were born." *(The doorbell rings. SADIE enters from arch Right.)*
- SADIE:** *(Moving across the room)* Rhett, where shall I go? What shall I do? Frankly, my dear, I don't give a ...*(Doorbell. She exits.)*
- GRANDMA:** *(To RAMEY)* Where's little Willie and Kim?
- RAMEY:** I think Willie's out playing ball in the yard and Kimberly is over at one of her friend's house.
- GRANDMA:** You realize it's been about a year since I've seen you people?
- RAMEY:** Has it been that long? *(SADIE enters through arch Left carrying a wrapped picture.)*
- SADIE:** That was just the man from the antique store delivering the picture.
- RAMEY:** Good. Mother was worried about it arriving in time. Just set it down anywhere, Sadie.
- SADIE:** *(Places the picture down by chair right center)* I've got to get in there and finish thawin' out that hamburger meat.

RAMEY: Hamburger? But Sadie, I thought Mother asked you to cook chicken.

SADIE: She did, but I already had that hamburger meat halfway defrosted. *(Before she exits)* By the way, Ramey, I borrowed your hair dryer to speed up the thawin' process.

RAMEY: My hair dry...Sadie?

GRANDMA: Bless that girl's heart; your mama is riding her harder than a rented mule.

RAMEY: *(Crosses to picture)* I guess I'd better put this in a safe place.

GRANDMA: *(Pointing to the picture)* What do you have there, honey? *(We hear a hair drying running backstage.)*

RAMEY: It's a painting Mother bought. I guess she's going to hang it in a prominent place.

GRANDMA: Let's take a sneak peek at it and see what kind of taste your mama's got. *(Crosses to RAMEY)*

RAMEY: I guess that would be all right. *(Takes off the wrapping)*

GRANDMA: *(Cocking her head to the side)* Well, that sure is interesting. Don't you think that's interesting?

RAMEY: *(Cocking her head the opposite way)* It sure is.

GRANDMA: There's just one thing I'm not sure about. What's it a picture of?

RAMEY: Maybe it's upside down. *(They turn the picture over.)* There, that's better.

GRANDMA: I still don't see anything but a bunch of colored splotches.

RAMEY: Mother asked them to send out something classy. She hasn't even seen it.

GRANDMA: She couldn't sell this thing at a yard sale.

RAMEY: This kind of thing was what I was telling you about. She's becoming unbearable, Grandma. For example, I've fallen for a boy here in town. He's the sweetest, most sincere person I've ever met. But Mother doesn't approve of him.

GRANDMA: That's awful.

RAMEY: And on top of that, she's planning to send poor Kimberly to a snooty all-girl school – and she's got Willie learning to play the violin which makes him miserable – and...

GRANDMA: Hold on there a minute – catch your breath. What in the world has come over that daughter of mine? *(Picks up her bags)* Come on, let's take my things upstairs and you can tell me all about it.

RAMEY: All right. I'll put this painting in the closet to keep it safe. *(She takes the painting, puts it in the closet down Right, leaves door open then follows GRANDMA out arch Right. There is a pause. Suddenly a ball comes through the open window up center and goes into the closet)*

down Right, from which a loud crash emerges. WILLIE climbs in through the window up center.)

WILLIE: *(Calling back through window)* I'll get it! Good thing the window was open or we'd be in for it. *(He crosses to the closet door, looks in, shuts the closet door quickly. He looks wide-eyed. He peeks back inside the closet then shuts it again. Shorty! (SHORTY comes through the window and crosses to WILLIE.)*

SHORTY: What's wrong?

WILLIE: *(Pulls the painting out. It has a hole in it.)* Look at this.

SHORTY: What is it?

WILLIE: Mom's new painting she just had delivered.

SHORTY: Look at that hole. Why didn't you catch that ball?

WILLIE: Me?

SHORTY: Oh, so this is *my* fault?

WILLIE: Well, it's sure not mine!

SHORTY: Oh yeah, well...

WILLIE: Hold it. Just be quiet, Shorty – arguing about it won't help matters.

This is a masterpiece! There's no telling how much it costs.

SHORTY: Maybe we can glue it back together.

WILLIE: Mom hasn't even seen it yet.

SHORTY: If you ask me, it's an ugly picture anyway.

WILLIE: What would you know about art? I've got to do something about that hole. Shorty, can I borrow your bike and ride down to the antique shop? Maybe they can glue it back together.

SHORTY: Why *my* bike?

WILLIE: Mine has a flat. Besides, this whole thing is your fault. You've got to promise me you won't say a word about this to anybody.

SHORTY: I promise.

WILLIE: I'll see you later.

SHORTY: Be careful with my bike! *(SHORTY follows WILLIE out arch Left. GRANDMA and RAMEY enter through arch Right.)*

GRANDMA: That beats all I have ever seen. My own daughter trying to get all high society at this time in her life.

RAMEY: It sure is stressful.

GRANDMA: I guess she's trying to make up for all those days she grew up poor on the farm.

RAMEY: She keeps telling us she's doing this for our own good.

GRANDMA: There's nothing that makes me madder than somebody who tries to be something they're not!

RAMEY: I agree, but what can I do about it?

BRANDON appears at the window up center.

BRANDON: Pssst, Ramey. Is the coast clear?

RAMEY: *(Turning to the window)* Brandon! *(Runs to him)* Am I glad to see you.

GRANDMA: Is this the boy you were telling me about, Ramey?

RAMEY: *(Helping BRANDON crawl through the window)* Yes. Brandon, this is my grandmother. She surprised us today with a visit.

BRANDON: *(Shaking GRANDMA'S hand)* Nice to meet you.

GRANDMA: *(Looking him over)* Well, look at you. *(Walking around him, looking through her bifocals)* Broad shoulders; strong chin; arms just the right length. Yes sir, I can tell you're a fine upstanding young man.

RAMEY: So I take it you approve, Grandma?

GRANDMA: Of course I approve. Ramey, hun, you went and found yourself a hunk.

BRANDON: *(Flattered but embarrassed)* Thank you for your support, Mrs. Simms.

RAMEY: Brandon is coaching Willie's team and also teaching Willie how to train dogs.

GRANDMA: *(To BRANDON)* You're a sweet, sweet boy.

RAMEY: *(To GRANDMA)* I was telling Grandma about our situation.

GRANDMA: Don't give up. Remember, where's there's a will there's a way. And I have a very strong will and I usually get my way.

RAMEY: Do you really think there's a chance to change Mother's determined mind, Grandma?

GRANDMA: Oh, she's so stubborn she'd agree with a stop sign. But everybody has a weak spot. I tell you what, I'm going to run upstairs and get my brain to working on this. I'll come up with something. This just might turn out to be more fun than I thought. *(She exits out arch Right.)*

RAMEY: *(Crosses to sofa followed by BRANDON)* I think it's safe to say Grandma likes you. *(They sit. KIMBERLY and KASY enter through arch Left.)*

KIMBERLY: Are we interrupting something?

RAMEY: *(Smiling to BRANDON)* I guess it's just not meant for us to be alone. *(Turns to KIMBERLY)* Not a thing, come on in.

KIMBERLY: We were over at Kasey's listening to our new CDs and...

RAMEY: Kimberly, guess who just arrived.

KIMBERLY: *(Alarmed)* Don't tell me the society bunch is already here.

RAMEY: Better than that. Grandma took a bus in from the farm.

KIMBERLY: Grandma? Where is she?

RAMEY: Upstairs.

KIMBERLY: Come on, Kasey, I want you to meet my favorite grandma...

RAMEY: No, wait! I don't think she wants to be disturbed.

KIMBERLY: Why? Is she sick?

RAMEY: No, she's thinking. I told her about the trouble we've been having with Mother and she's determined to come up with a plan that will rescue us.

BRANDON: And just from my first impression, I would say Grandma is someone to get things done.

GRANDMA: (*Hurries in arch Right, stops by KIMBERLY and shouts*) Happy days are here again!

RAMEY: Grandma, I thought you were going to go upstairs to think things through.

GRANDMA: (*Excited*) I did, child! I did!

KIMBERLY: (*Hugs GRANDMA*) It's good to see you, Grandma!

GRANDMA: Little Kim, I didn't know you were here!

RAMEY: Are you telling me you've thought of a way to stop Mother?

GRANDMA: Only the best brainchild I've ever had. Can't believe I didn't think of it right away! (*Produces an envelope from her pocket*) It's all in this letter. (*She crosses to sofa and sits. Everyone surrounds her.*) Let me sit down here and start from the beginning.

RAMEY: Yes ma'am, that would be a good place.

GRANDMA: Have you two girls ever heard of your Cousin Oscar?

RAMEY: (*Glances at KIMBERLY; KIMBERLY shrugs her shoulders*) Cousin Oscar? I don't think so.

GRANDMA: He hasn't been around in years – but your mother knows about him.

KIMBERLY: Wait a minute. (*Thinking*) Cousin Oscar. I've heard his name come up – and when it does, everyone always looks funny.

GRANDMA: No wonder. Your Cousin Oscar is sort of the black sheep of the family. Nobody really knows that much about him. I haven't seen him myself since he was knee-high to a grasshopper. As a matter of fact, I'm the only living member of the family who ever saw Cousin Oscar in the flesh.

RAMEY: What did he do that was so awful?

GRANDMA: It's sort of mysterious. When he was about twelve years old, he ran off and joined the circus and that's when we lost contact with him. I've heard some tell that he's served time in jail and other scandalous stuff like that.

KIMBERLY: Jail?

RAMEY: But Grandma, what does all this have to do with your plan?

GRANDMA: That's the good part. As I was reading this letter on the bus, it just hit me what it said. It seems that Cousin Oscar is living not more than thirty miles from this very spot. The reason he wrote me was because he had lost contact with the rest of the family.

KIMBERLY: But I still don't see...

GRANDMA: *(Folds the letter and places it in her pocket)* I guess I'm not making myself too clear. Here's my idea: Cousin Oscar is a renegade – you know, joined the circus, got thrown in jail and all that. Not somebody with the type of reputation your mama would be proud of. So, what if, after the high society company arrives, dear Cousin Oscar suddenly shows up at your mother's doorstep.

RAMEY: Oh, I get it.

GRANDMA: Think about it. You put low class, ex jailbird with high-class socialites and there's bound to be something to happen to help your mother see the light.

BRANDON: *(Smiling and patting GRANDMA on the shoulder)* I think you might just have something there, Grandma.

RAMEY: I don't know – it seems a little underhanded.

BRANDON: *(To RAMEY)* Don't you see? It's our last chance – we've tried everything else.

KIMBERLY: Underhanded or not – I hope Cousin Oscar is the most ill-bred hoodlum in the world and that he shocks the girdle right off that uptight Miss Quelch.

GRANDMA: He included his email address in his letter, so show me a computer and I'll send him an invitation right now.

RAMEY: There's a computer in my room.

BRANDON: Hey! Ask him to bring his entire family.

GRANDMA: *(Pointing to BRANDON)* I like the way you think, mister. Operation Cousin Oscar officially underway. *(GRANDMA exits quickly.)*

RAMEY: This is our last hope. If this doesn't work, nothing will. *(The lights fade to a...)*

BLACKOUT

ACT I Scene 2

TIME: It is now about four hours later

PLACE: Same.

AT RISE: Grandma is seated on the sofa, BRANDON and RAMEY beside her. WILLIE stands near the closet door down right and, now and then, looks toward it nervously.

KIMBERLY: Grandma, are you as nervous about all this as I am?

GRANDMA: Not nervous a bit, Little Kim - excited! I never see this much fun on the farm. The last time something exciting happened there was when one of our chickens laid an egg.

BRANDON: What's exciting about that?

GRANDMA: The chicken was a rooster.

- KIMBERLY:** Grandma, you're fibbing again.
- GRANDMA:** People come from miles around to see Randy the miracle rooster.
- BRANDON:** *(Shaking his head, smiling)* You're a lady of mystery, Grandma.
- RAMEY:** *(Rushing in through arch Right)* We got it! Cousin Oscar's email – we got it!
- BRANDON:** What did he say?
- RAMEY:** He said he's excited to come over and meet the family he's lost touch with for so many years. Grandma, looks like your plan may prove to be successful after all.
- GRANDMA:** Of course it will be. I just hope he's a no-good rascal. *(Laughs and slaps her leg)*
- BRANDON:** I just thought of something. What if Cousin Oscar turns out to be respectful?
- RAMEY:** That's right, for all we know, he could be a self-made millionaire by now.
- GRANDMA:** Impossible. I've got a strong hunch Cousin Oscar's going to turn out just like we reckon. And when I get a hunch about people, it usually ain't too far off.
- KIMBERLY:** *(Giggling)* Maybe he's a circus performer. That'd be enough to make ol' Mrs. Carlson turn red.
- RAMEY:** *(To WILLIE who is looking into the closet)* Willie, what's the matter with you? You're acting more nervous than anybody.
- WILLIE:** *(Trying to act casually, hands in pockets)* Huh? Oh, nothing. I wasn't looking at anything in the closet. Just a normal closet. *(Shuts the closet door)*
- GRANDMA:** Bless his heart, your mama's got him so worked up he ain't even making sense. I tell you what, now that we know Cousin Oscar's coming over, let's make ourselves busy so we don't give our plan away when Leonie comes home. I Think I'll go out and take a look at her flower garden.
- RAMEY:** That's a good idea. Sadie may need some help in the kitchen.
- BRANDON:** *(To RAMEY)* I'll go with you, I'm getting hungry.
- KIMBERLY:** I'll give Kasey a ring.
- WILLIE:** You just talked to her on the phone an hour ago.
- KIMBERLY:** A lot can happen in a teenager's life in an hour. *(Exits through arch Right.)*
- GRANDMA:** Everybody just remember not to spill the beans before due time. *(She exits through arch Left. WILLIE crosses to door of the closet and looks in. SHORTY appears in the window up center.)*
- SHORTY:** Hey Willie.
- WILLIE:** Shorty, get over here!

SHORTY: (*Climbing through the window*) It's about time you got back; I was about to think you skipped town with my bike.

WILLIE: (*Speaking confidently*) Listen, Shorty. I have taken care of everything.

SHORTY: Did they glue the hole back together?

WILLIE: Even better than that. I got a whole *new* picture!

SHORTY: You mean you traded the other one?

WILLIE: (*Proud of himself*) No, I got it for nothing.

SHORTY: (*Getting excited about a possible adventure*) What did you do, steal it?

WILLIE: If you'll be quiet long enough, I'll tell you. (*Looks around to make sure no one is listening*) It was like this: I was riding your bike down the street, trying to find the antique shop. I wasn't having any luck, so I stopped and ask a guy who was leaning up on this building if he knew where the shop was. He said, "Why do you want to know?" So I told him about the busted picture.

SHORTY: Then what?

WILLIE: (*With pride, sticking out his chest*) That's when he gives me a brand *new* picture.

SHORTY: Huh? I don't get it.

WILLIE: Neither do I. He just said that he's been trying to sell the picture but nobody wanted it. Then he says that he feels sorry for me and doesn't want to see me get in trouble so he gives me the picture for free.

SHORTY: (*Still a little confused*) And you took it?

WILLIE: Of course I took it. It was the luckiest moment of my whole life.

SHORTY: What did you do with your mom's picture?

WILLIE: I hid it out back in the shed. She's never seen her picture so she won't know the difference.

SHORTY: Something doesn't sound right about the whole thing. What if this new picture's not worth anything?

WILLIE: It has to be worth something. It's even uglier than the one Mom bought.

SHORTY: No wonder that guy was willing to give it away; he was probably one of those starving artist. Speaking of starving, I guess I'd better go home and eat dinner.

WILLIE: All right. I've got to get my ball and glove out of the yard before Mom has a conniption. They exit through arch Left. After a moment, in the window, a man's head appears and looks in. It is PATCH. After looking about, he raises himself and climbs in, looking around the room with haste. He then rushes over to the closet, looks in, seems pleased and enters it, reappearing in a moment carrying the new picture. Suddenly, GRANDMA'S voice is heard off Left.)

GRANDMA'S VOICE: Willie, make sure you get that ball bat too before it's run over with the lawn mower! (*PATCH crosses uncertainly toward the window, looks out arch Left, thinks better of it, and hastily returns the picture to the closet and shuts the door. GRANDMA enters arch Left and sees PATCH.*)

GRANDMA: Well, hello there young fellow. And who would you be?

PATCH: (*Nervous*) Well, uh – dat is – uh- ya see...

GRANDMA: (*Clasping her hands together*) Wait a minute – don't tell me...(*Circling him*) You're HIM ain't you?

PATCH: (*Confused, backing away*) Him?

GRANDMA: Of course you are. Oh, you just don't know how glad we are you were able to come! I'm sorry I wasn't in here to welcome you.

PATCH: Oh, dat's okay. I didn't mind – (*Trying to make his way toward Left.*)

GRANDMA: (*Takes his arm and pulls him down center*) Well, sit yourself down – don't be nervous. First of all, we want you to know that none of the family holds any of your past against you – No sir, we're going to let bygones be bygones. (*Looks around*) You brought your family with you, didn't you?

PATCH: Me family? (*Seizing the opportunity*) Oh yeah, uh – I'll go out to the car and get 'em. (*Crossing desperately to left*)

GRANDMA: (*Taking his arm again*) Now, hold on just a minute. I want to talk to you first. Won't take a second.

PATCH: Well, yuh see –

GRANDMA: When you go to the car, tell 'em that we want them to stay for a while.

PATCH: (*Interested now*) Stay?

GRANDMA: Sure, it's been so long, we want to get reacquainted with you all.

PATCH: (*A fiendish light in his eye as he slowly crosses and stares at the closet door*) Now that I tinks on it, I'd like to stay near dat pitcher–

GRANDMA: What?

PATCH: I mean my family – all of yuh, dat is.

GRANDMA: Do you mean it? My uppity daughter will be so surprised to see you, she won't know what hit her.

PATCH: (*Considering*) Hum – well, we have been lookin' fer a hideout – I mean, a nice place to visit.

GRANDMA: (*Pleased*) Then it's all settled. Now go on and get your family right away!

PATCH: (*All for it*) Yeah – maybe I should do dat.

GRANDMA: Meanwhile, I'll get the rest of the clan in here and you can meet everybody.

KIMBERLY'S VOICE: Grandma, are you talking to someone?

By Eddie McPherson

GRANDMA: Oh, here they are now. *(Calls)* Everybody, get in here! Look who's finally showed up! *(KIMBERLY, RAMEY, and BRANDON enter through arch Right. SADIE follows.)*

RAMEY: Grandma, is it who we think it is?

GRANDMA: Well, just come on in and look for yourself. Everybody, I'd like you to meet your long-lost Cousin Oscar.

ALL come toward him, hands extended. PATCH is paranoid and backs up at first but then smiles and plays along. ALL greet him, saying, 'Hello, Cousin Oscar;', "Finally nice to meet you" etc.

PATCH: *(Self consciously)* Uh- I'm pleezed ta meetchuz. All of yuhs...*(Throws his arms out)* Me long-lost family!

SADIE: I sure hope you like hamburger, Cousin Oscar. 'Course if you don't, we'll have plenty of poison to eat too. *(Slaps him on the back as everyone chatters with him, looking him over with much approval. The lights fade to a slow...)*

BLACKOUT

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